

Session 1 The Flowing Heart, Part 1

INTRODUCTION

In its blessed written form, the Bible is called the Word of God. When that holy transcript enters our heart, when we feed our spirit on it, when we live by it, it's combustive. It spontaneously awakens the flame inside of us. When my fire burns low, I know how to get it going again. I understand just a little what this book is; it's a holy transcript of God's burning heart. It has living understanding in it. I don't care how dry you feel, I don't care how bad it is; you just begin to feed your spirit with it. Your spirit begins to spontaneously awaken; a flame awakens on the inside.

Another way to term that is "tenderizing feelings." Tenderness is awakened. Feelings of feeling loved and feeling loved back is what I mean by *fire*. The most precious possession that a human soul can have is this spontaneous flame that breaks open inside of you.

The Lord says, "You feed your spirit on the word with an attitude of devotion." I don't mean just an academic approach, although I do appreciate academic approaches to the Word; but it's more than that. You read it with a spirit of devotion, with an "I love You" in your spirit, and that holy transcript awakens something inside of you. It's absolutely supernatural. It's miraculous how that happens. It's a miracle how the written transcript of God's soul awakens the flame on the inside when we read it with a spirit of devotion alongside a spirit of dedication. We have the "I want to obey You," which is the spirit of dedication, alongside the "I want to love You," which is the spirit of devotion.

When we read the Word with a spirit of dedication and devotion in the grace of God, with the knowledge that God loves us even in our weakness, when we read it with a spirit of grace, I tell you, it's a miraculous awakening on the inside. I don't care how hard your heart is, how cold, how many layers of strongholds, how many demons possess it: nothing can withstand the power of the holy transcript, the written word, when it enters inside of us with a spirit of dedication—"I'll obey You"—and a spirit of devotion—"I love You"—with a spirit of grace. "I've a confidence that You love me and want me even in my weakness." You put this Word inside of you, and again, I don't care how big the stronghold is; I don't care how thick the crust is: that rusty, crusty, barren soul will give way to this combustive flame on the inside. When the written Word gets on the inside, with that spirit of dedication, that spirit of devotion, and that spirit of grace, it becomes a flame of fire on the inside of us.

THE WORD WON'T BURN INSIDE OF US WITHOUT A SPIRIT OF DEDICATION

We all know that in theory. People say, "Yes, we know that if we read the Word more, more will happen." Then they go and read the Word more, but they don't read it with a spirit of dedication. They're living in compromise. They're living in compromise in an unconcerned way.

You may be stumbling; you're stumbling, but you're saying, "Oh, I hate this, I hate this God," You still have, in God's esteem, a spirit of dedication.

If you're living in compromise and you're saying, "Well, you know, boys will be boys, so what?" that's compromise. When we accept the gaps in our life in God, when we accept the areas of stumbling, when we accept the weakness in our areas of sin as normal and resolve that we're just going to give in, that's called

compromise. But when we're genuinely resisting it, even though it's present; when we still have a spirit of dedication and we're working through our immaturity, the Lord knows our hearts.

One man says, "Well, I read the Word."

I say, "Yes, but you didn't read it with a spirit of dedication, with the intention of being wholehearted."

He says, "Yeah, you're right."

I say, "You took your areas of sin and weakness and camped out there and gave in and said, 'I'm just going to live in compromise.'" The Word won't become alive in you without a spirit of dedication.

Another man says, "Well, I have the spirit of dedication; man, I'll do anything that God says. I read the Word and it's still dead."

Yes, but you need to read it with an "I love You" in your spirit. You need to read it and turn it into dialogue. As you're reading it, you're not just reading it for information. You're dedicated; you're reading it with a desire to turn it into a love dialogue. It's a two-way dialogue. You're reading what God is saying, and you're saying, "Lord, this is what You're saying to me."

We're receiving it as His statements of love to us and we're turning it back into "I love You." We create dialogue. There needs to be a spirit of devotion alongside the spirit of dedication. You can't do it without both of them.

But there's another thing. We need to do this in the spirit of grace, in the confidence that God longs for us and enjoys us even in our weakness.

One man says, "I'm reading it, I'm dedicated, I'll do anything. I mean, I'm serious. I read the word with an 'I love You', and then I know that God doesn't really take me seriously." In other words, they're still reading it with a spirit of legalism, and the flame doesn't really take root. If you read the word with the spirit of dedication, the spirit of devotion, and the spirit of grace, and you stay with it consistently, I'm telling you, there's no demonic stronghold, no rusty, crusty, spirit of barrenness that can withstand the power of this combustive flame on the inside. I want to challenge you to believe the Word of God can actually turn your heart if approached in a biblical way.

"HE WHO BELIEVES ON ME, AS THE SCRIPTURE HAS SAID. . ."

Jesus said, in John 7:38, "Rivers of living water will flow out of your inner man" (Jn. 7:38, paraphrased). Here's the condition, though: you have to read it rightly. He said, "This will only happen if you believe on Me in the way the Scripture says" (ibid). Rivers will flow. You could call it a flowing river; you could call it a fiery heart or a fiery flame; it's the same thing. Whether it's a flowing river on the inside, as in John 7:38, or rivers flowing in the innermost man, or fire burning on the heart, it's an identical concept.

Jesus said in John 7:38, "Rivers will flow." I'm paraphrasing, but there's a condition. People don't read the condition, and the condition is this: "If you believe on Me in the way the Scriptures describe believing on Me."

The biblical definition of believing is believing that incorporates a spirit of dedication, a spirit of devotion, and a spirit of grace.

I've found that many, many people approach the Word with two of the three. You have to believe on Him in the way the Scripture says. You can't pick two out of three and then expect the rivers to flow. It's three out of three. We have to feed our spirit on all three things. We need to have the vision to be wholehearted. There's no substitute for the yes in your spirits, for the determination to have a hundredfold obedience. There's absolutely no substitute for a big yes in your spirit. You may not walk it out, but it's a fiery determination in your soul to get through those issues. The Lord says, "I see that. That's real to me."

It's not enough to be a rule keeper who says, "I'll stay out of all the bad mud holes." You have to have a spirit of devotion, and an "I love You" in the journey.

That's not enough either. I know a lot of people on the IHOP-KC staff who have devotion and dedication, but they aren't established in the spirit of grace. They have an "I will obey You" and "I love You," but they say, "Lord, I know that You don't take me seriously yet and I know that I'm still on probation. I know that I still haven't earned the right yet to enjoy Your presence." They don't have the spirit of grace operating yet. They end up giving up on the miraculous power of the written Word touching the inner man. They give up on it. They say, "Well, I read the Word and it just didn't work." No, you didn't believe on Him in the way the Scripture says. You believed on Him in the way your denomination taught you. You believed on him in the way your fellowship taught you. You believed on Him in the way your Bible camp taught you. That's not enough. We need to believe on Him in the way the Scripture teaches and then, like He said in John 7:38, it flows like a river on the inside, in time. I don't mean that night, necessarily, but over time, it flows like a river on the inside.

THE HEART IS SET ON FIRE BY FAITH IN THE WORD

2 Thessalonians 2:13—I'm just throwing that verse out there. We'll be going to 1 John in a moment. It says this: the way that you enter into sanctification, the way that you enter is by faith in the Word and by the Holy Spirit. The way the heart is set on fire is when we have faith in the Word. We believe what the Word of God says, but particularly about the need for the spirit of dedication, the spirit of devotion, and the spirit of grace. You can call those three things different things if you want; you can use your own terms. You can call it a spirit of obedience instead of dedication; you can call it a spirit of "I love you" instead of devotion. You can call it what you want, but those realities need to be present in the heart.

Let me tell you, when those things are present, the Word of God has a miraculous dimension of releasing fire, or releasing the living waters. It has a miraculous dimension of changing your emotional chemistry. It changes you for real if you do this consistently. I've never seen it fail, ever. I've seen people give up on the process and I've seen them approach with two of the three or, more commonly, one of those three elements. They approach reading the Word with one of those three elements, or sometimes two. Sometimes they have all three of the elements, but they give up in a month or two. At least give it a good five-year run before you conclude that the Word of God doesn't work. Don't give it three months; give it five years. It won't take five years, but when those five years come and go, you'll look back over it and say, "Oh, my heart is flowing like a river; I don't even know when it started."

I absolutely assure you that there's a miraculous dimension where the Word of God touches the human heart with these three components: the spirit of dedication, the spirit of devotion, and the spirit of grace. I find that the

most difficult is the spirit of grace. I find that the easiest is the spirit of dedication. If you have 1,000 people out there at a conference, 800 will say yes to a spirit of dedication. Large numbers of people will say, “I will go all the way.” The vision to be wholehearted is a very important vision. It’s a life vision. It’s a personal vision in your heart, a determination, saying, “I will be wholehearted.” Eight hundred of them will say yes to dedication. About half of them will say yes to devotion. About half of the people standing up will go into the “I love You” dimension.” Four hundred of them will say, “I love You, and I feel the assurance that You enjoy me even in my weakness, in the process, while my love is maturing.”

I find that saying yes to dedication is the easiest one. That’s why I don’t spend as much time cultivating that. Multitudes of preachers around the land are calling people to dedication, and I love it. If there are 10,000 preachers doing it, we need 20,000. We need twice as many doing it. I don’t mean that we have enough, but that message is emerging and it’s wonderful, it’s pleasing to God’s heart and it’s pleasing to our soul as a people. We love that kind of preaching. I don’t need to do that so much because that voice is going forth in the land, although we need more. I’m just telling you my personal journey, and I say, “Lord, I want to call the spirit of devotion; there’s not so much of that.” There’s a lot more of that going on than there was; not as much as the preaching on dedication, but it’s starting to emerge more and more.

I tell you, the absolute, most difficult thing is to teach with clarity that God enjoys us; to impart the assurance that we’re enjoyed while in the process of maturing in our devotion and dedication. There’s assurance that we’re embraced and enjoyed while the dedication and the devotion are both maturing. That’s where, in my opinion, the Body of Christ cancels out in the process of having a heart flowing like living waters; a flowing heart, a heart flowing like a river. I love to use that phrase; I’ve used it for years: “O Lord, cause our heart to flow like a river.” I’m quoting John 7:38. Out of our innermost man will flow rivers. Our heart will flow like a river.

I don’t claim to understand the spirit of grace fully, but I’ve been focused on it for some years now and so I have foundational understanding on it. Taking a step back, I would think that’s the one that everyone would go for. Because when you really understand it, that’s the one that always awakens the other two. But for some reason, that’s the one that’s minimized the most. Then, quite often, I hear people speaking on the spirit of grace but without a call to devotion and dedication, and that ends up being licentiousness and false grace. They’re calling people to have confidence in a life of settled carnality and compromise. That’s not the gospel of Jesus—to give people a concept of God that brings them confidence in blatantly neglecting devotion and dedication. That’s a false religion. That’s humanistic preaching, and there’s a lot of that. It’s saying, “All paths lead to God and God understands; there’s a small amount of God in everyone.” So say many versions of the “spirit of grace,” but without the dedication and devotion that are necessary. If we’re going to preach the Word of God, we have to preach all three.

I find that the majority of people who come my way—not 100 percent, but the majority of folks—who sit in this room, have said yes to dedication and yes to devotion. Not all of them; someone was dragged in by the ear by someone else; they’re sitting in the chair saying, “How did I get in here?” However, most people who sit in this room have a big yes in their spirit to devotion and dedication; that’s why I’m unrelenting on the spirit of grace to the people sitting in this room. Those who have been around for a while, and those who are training others or being trained to train others in the days to come, I’m explaining this to you for your own understanding. When I’m speaking at a conference or speaking to people who are coming into our midst and I have a confidence that they already have dedication and devotion and that those realities are established and growing in their hearts—

they aren't fully mature, but they're saying yes to those two things—almost always I go for the message of the spirit of grace. When I go to a place where there's a lot of compromise, I go heavy on the dedication.

People will be traveling with me and they'll say, "Man, that doesn't sound like the grace message that you taught back home." And I say, "No, I want to stir them up. They need to be called to holiness, to dedication."

I'm talking about the spirit of grace in a very narrow sense tonight, because the message of grace is really the whole thing, but the spirit of grace in the sense that I'm using it now means the assurance that God enjoys us, that God longs for us, that God delights in us, that God embraces us while our dedication and our devotion is maturing. That message is only real if it's in the context of people who are saying yes to devotion and dedication. Those in our midst, our intern leaders and other Bible schoolteachers in the days to come, need to grasp these ideas. It's very, very important to understand these. I focus my message differently depending on the people sitting in the chairs, depending on the need in the room. Sometimes people will sit under the teaching of the Word here and they'll go out and focus on the spirit of grace wherever they go, and I say, "No, they need to be called to dedication."

One group is really into dedication; they'll die for Jesus, they'll go to the mission field, they'll be martyrs, they'll do everything, but they don't have a spirit of devotion. They don't have an "I love You" emerging in them. Deep in their spirit, they do love God; it's real, but they've never developed that dimension of their walk with God.

THE SPIRIT OF GRACE IS THE HARDEST DIMENSION TO ACCEPT

In some places I focus on the devotion. Typically I focus on one of those three. When I get those three flowing together, then I want to give the other dimension of the forerunner message, which is calling people to be prepared for the great shaking that's coming. Typically on Saturday nights I teach on the judgments of God and the increasing rage of darkness, which is what I typically, teach on, on Saturday nights. It's the whole end-time dimension of the kingdom. There's a really dramatic dimension of the end times. If I go somewhere and they've been here and heard me teach on it and want me to speak on the end times, I'll say, "No, this crowd is so weak on devotion and dedication and grace, the other thing will just break them. They have no grid for it. It won't edify them; they'll just collapse in fear with no root system to gird them up."

You can't prepare them with the knowledge that the revival will be great and the shaking will be terrifying; that by itself, in a vacuum, doesn't help. It only helps at the end of the day if there's a root system in those other three things. Tonight I'm really focusing on those of you who are teachers of the Word, and giving you some of the logic, the way I think it through when I'm going to speak to a group of people.

Look at 1 John 4:16. It's the spirit of grace; grace is the whole long. It's this assurance, this confidence in love that's the most difficult dimension to awaken in people who are dedicated and who are devoted. Why? Possibly because it's the most powerful, and the one that has the most warfare resisting it. Maybe there are so many years of religious teaching that it's like ten feet of dried cement. We need to break up that old cement and we need to pour it again. We need to have the jackhammer of our spirits break up all of those old ideas and begin afresh. I find that this is the most difficult one that people have in receiving. You'd think it would be the one that they like the most, but it's the one that they resist the most.

“WE HAVE KNOWN AND BELIEVED THE LOVE THAT GOD HAS FOR US”

“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:16-19).

What a powerful four verses. Let’s break it down a little. “We have known and believed the love that God has for us.” This is an absolutely fundamental statement. This was one of John’s major goals as an apostle, to get the early church to know and believe the love that God has for us. You could take that sentence and lift it out, and that could be your preaching, teaching, and discipleship focus for years right there. John’s first premise to establish in the life of a dedicated believer was that they might know and believe the love that God has for us. Instead of the word *love*, put the word *affection*. Instead of the word *affection*, put “the assurance that God enjoys us.” Everyone knows that God loves us technically, though the word *love*, if it’s understood in its real sense, is so powerful. It’s the biblical word; it’s the best word. But it’s a word that’s over-used, in all the greeting cards and everything, so that sometimes we don’t have the fresh feel of the dynamic of the word. Put the word *affection*; put the phrase, “the burning desire that God has for us.” Put the phrase, “the assurance of His delight and enjoyment even in our weakness.”

“We have known and believed.” Instead of the word *known*, put the word *experienced*. When the Bible talks about knowing something in God, it means you’ve had experience of it. It doesn’t mean intellectual data, although it starts with intellectual data. It starts with ideas that hit the mind. We take the ideas and we put some “I love You” around them when we turn them into dialogue with God. I take biblical information and I say, “Oh God, show me this. I love You. I want to know this. You love me.” I begin to speak it to God in a conversation with a spirit of devotion in it, and that biblical information becomes an experience. Then the word *known* is the word to use.

“We have known,” which means we have experienced the love that God has for us. We will never outgrow this foundation. Ephesians 3:18 says that you’ll never, ever exhaust the length, the depth, and the height of God’s love. In eternity, a billion years from today, you and I will be talking and we will say, “We have believed the love that God has for us. Well, not really; there’s still more we’re discovering.” This is one of the great statements from heaven. This isn’t a guess; this is the holy, inspired word.

THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE, INEXHAUSTIBLE OCEAN OF THE LOVE OF GOD

God is an ocean of divine love. He *is* love. I just picture this vast ocean of burning desire, inexhaustible, indescribable, and incomprehensible in its fullness. If the ocean was fresh water, you could drink all that you could drink in a lifetime, every single day until you burst, and I tell you, you wouldn’t even dent that ocean. If you took a million people and lined them up along the west coast before the Pacific Ocean, and the Pacific Ocean was sweet water, and they drank their whole lifetime, it wouldn’t dent the ocean. A billion years from now we still haven’t begun to experience, to exhaust the infinite ocean of His divine being. It’s His fiery desire forever and ever and ever. We wouldn’t even know this if the Holy Spirit hadn’t given it to us in the holy transcript, in the Word of God.

The big religions of the world don’t have a God of love at their center. The whole thing is motivated by anger, hate, shame, fear, and all kinds of things. The very centerpiece of everything that we’re about is an ocean of

burning desire that can never, ever be exhausted, it's so vast. I love this! Just hook me up to an IV and never turn it off. It's called the Holy Spirit forever filling me. The Lord says, "Do you want more?"

I say, "Yes."

The Lord says, "Take the living Word and feed on it with a spirit of dedication, a spirit of devotion, and the spirit of grace, and it will combust inside your spirit; and your heart will flow like a river."

LIVING IN THE EXPERIENCE OF FEEDING YOURSELF ON THE REALITY OF LOVE

It's no mystery how to shake off the spirit of slumber and the spirit of barrenness that gets hold of our soul. It gets hold of you and it gets hold of me. In one season we're going really hot; it's like the frog in the kettle. It's the subtle processes, and we don't even know how it happens. We turn around one day and the fresh fire is diminished. We don't have to panic; we know how to get it back. We go and we fill our spirit the Word of God. It's not enough to come and worship. Worship is fantastic; I love worship, but I want to worship with the Word. I want to read the Word and feed on the Word. I want to speak the Word back in conversation and loving dialogue. I want the Word, the Word, the Word, and the word in an atmosphere of worship, and that spontaneous combustion on the inside is the work of grace. It's the Holy Spirit.

God is love. Now when he says *abide*, let's put the word *lives*: "the person who lives or experiences love." If you drink from the ocean of love, if you drink of this doctrine, you feed your spirit on it. When it says, "Abide in love," the word *abide* means *live* or *dwell*; it means living in the experience of feeding yourself on the reality of love. In my little world here at IHOP-KC, it means I'm in a prayer room here and I'm walking back and forth; I like to walk, I like to pace, with my Bible open, and I like to read about the subject of divine love. I have my Bible open, reading the Song of Solomon. The worship is in the air and it's a fasting day. If you throw fasting in, fasting doesn't earn you anything; it just increases your capacity to receive more a lot faster. It enlarges your capacity to receive. Fasting doesn't earn you anything; fasting increases your capacity to receive.

I'm pacing through the prayer room, reading the Song of Solomon; it's a fasting day, and there's an "I love You" all over. The worship is going and I'm reading, saying, "I love You, God." That's the initial step to abiding; living in the realm of love and feeding your spirit of love.

THE PROGRESSION OF THREEFOLD LOVE

Lest you lose your way in this, when the Bible uses the word *love*, it normally refers to threefold love. There's always a progression in the threefold love. The first love is the revelation that God loves us. The second is an awakening in our heart to love Him back. We call that passion for Jesus. The third is love for people. We feed ourselves on the fact that He loves us. This is what verse 19 says: that's where it starts first. When it's talking about living in love, it's not limiting us to just to feeding on the fact that God loves us. It awakens love to Him and then it overflows in love to people.

When I think of love for people, I think of three dimensions of love for people: it's the overflow of knowing that God loves us and then having an awakened heart to love Him back. There are three dimensions of loving people. The order is critical. The first dimension is that you love yourself. You absolutely fall in love with yourself with the love of God. You love who you are in God. Then you love the Body of Christ, and then it always overflows to loving the harvest, always. You can't separate those three things. You can't separate the whole package here. It's all one reality.

Sometimes I hear people talk and say, “Well, if we get people so focused on loving Jesus, what about loving people?”

I say, “That’s an absolutely academic, hypothetical, totally non-realistic debate.” Only the people who don’t experience love would bother to debate that. Anyone who has experienced it knows when your heart is tenderized by God loving you, you’re tenderized to love Him, and the tenderizing flows towards people: to yourself, to the Church, and to others. It’s absolutely impossible to separate. You can’t separate it.

I’ve heard debates. People say, “You know, if you spend too much time in the prayer room, you won’t care about people.”

I say, “Don’t worry about that. In the prayer room you run head on into the Man who died for people.” In the prayer room you run into the Man who loves the world. He died; He’ll lead you to die for the world. If they’re trying to evade people by being in the prayer room, they’re going to run into the biggest divine ambush that they’ve ever imagined. It’s like the fox in the chicken house. If they’re trying to escape people and they’ve run to the prayer room, they’re running into the Lion that roars for the good of others. That’s what His roar is. It may take them a little while to get healed up and bandaged and refreshed and renewed; but I guarantee this: it might be a year or two, but in a moment they’ll be fierce in their determination to give their life for others.

I went on that little parenthesis of the threefold love because the verse says, “He who abides in love abides in God” (1 Jn. 4:16, paraphrased). I’m only looking at the first part of love. Instead of the word *abides*, we’ll use the word *lives*. Instead of the word *lives*, put, “drinks the doctrine of the love of God for you in your weakness”; drinks or feeds your spirit on.

THE GREAT GIFT OF GOD IS THAT THE DAY COMES WHEN YOU LOVE BEING YOU

Let’s read it again. “He who feeds his spirit on the doctrine of the love of God”; that’s the beginning point. If you feed your spirit on that, all of a sudden it awakens fiery love for Jesus and it overflows in fiery love for people. In that fiery love for people there are three expressions. You’ll love yourself, you’ll love believers, and you’ll love the lost. You have to love yourself with the love of God. You have to love what God loves when He looks at you. The great gift of God is that the day comes when you love being you. You would rather be you with your weakness and your gift mix and the way that God made you than anyone else in the earth. You know that grace is touching your soul. God loves you in such a particular way, with such a focused uniqueness, and He beckons you to enter into His love for you. When you begin to feel, even to a small degree, the passion He feels when He looks at you, and that passion trickles down, you begin to love your neighbor as you love yourself. It’s the overflow of how you love yourself. This isn’t loving carnality; when Jesus says a man must hate himself and deny his life, it’s talking about his life outside of God. It’s talking about a carnal pursuit of a lifestyle separated from God. The Bible seems to contradict itself when it talks about loving yourself and hating yourself, but there’s no contradiction. If you understand the context, it’s simple. It’s hating that part that’s pursuing a life of disobedience, but loving who you are in the grace of God with a yes in your spirit.

LIVING IN LOVE BEGINS WITH THE REVELATION THAT HE ENJOYS YOU

I hear people pray, “Lord, I want to love my neighbor like I love myself.”

And the Lord says, “That’s the problem: you do love your neighbors like you love yourself, and you hate yourself.” It’s almost inevitable that you’ll love people like you love yourself. It’s almost an automatic principle. There’s another thing or two that you add to it, but it’s almost inevitable that you’ll love people like you love yourself. A person steeped in self-hatred is never going to have an overflow of supply to give other people. They’re going to be managing so much emotional traffic and collision in everything that they do, they can hardly ever give overflow. All of that emotional traffic on the inside causes them to say, “I’m good, I’m bad, they like me, they don’t, I’ll try, I’ll quit,” and all of this and that.

When all of that emotional traffic settles down and you actually wake up one day and it’s a little settled—I don’t mean it’s ever 100 percent settled in this life, but it does settle down—you wake up and your hard drive is cleared of all that extra data and it’s gone. You say, “I actually like people. It’s cool to be on the earth.” It’s a whole different way to live. It’s a whole new world, as the song goes.

We’re looking at this phrase, “He who abides in love.” It’s talking about the man or woman who lives in the realm of loving, who drinks of the doctrine of love. It starts with the revelation that He enjoys you, according to verse 19. It awakens in you an enjoyment of Him which overflows in an enjoyment for others, an enjoyment of people. It begins with loving and enjoying yourself. I can’t stress that enough; the great gift of God is that you wake up one day and you would rather be you with your limitations than any other human being. You’ve entered into that burning desire that God has uniquely for you, and you accept it as noble because it exists in God’s heart. You accept it as good, as dignified, as noble, as wise, as holy; you enter into that dimension of God’s heart and what He has for you. It’s the tailor-made passion that He has for you. It’s noble, it’s powerful, it’s awesome. God didn’t have a dark spot in His personality when He fell in love with you. It’s not like God is love and holy except for one dark spot in His personality, His preoccupation with you. His focus on you is part of His holiness and His greatness and grandeur. I want to enter into what God feels about me and say, “Oh, I like this.” It’s called confidence in love. It’s entering into our dignity.

A SIGNIFICANT PART OF GOD’S GLORY IS HIS PASSION FOR US

There’s a song. I love the spirit behind it, but the doctrine is really off. A lot of young people are singing it. It’s a wonderful spirit. I celebrate the spirit and I don’t get all weird about it, but in my soul I look up and wink at the Lord and He, I guess, winks back—something like that. The song says, “It’s not about us Lord, it’s only about You.” That’s absolutely false. It is about you. It’s not only about you, but it’s massively about you. The gospel is massively about you. Jesus didn’t become human and die for Himself; He died for you. The whole program is massively about you. But it’s not only about you. What it’s trying to express is that it’s not about our carnal success outside of the grace of God. That’s what they really mean. But it ends with this false idea, this separation, this dichotomy that there’s God and it’s about Him, and then there’s this great, big gap in God’s thinking, and He says, “Oh, right, I have to make you fit into this somehow.”

No. God says, “Part of My own glory is My passion for you.” It’s massively about us. Not only, but significantly more than we understand. When we understand that God’s heart is fully manifest, we’re engulfed; our dignity, our greatness, our beauty, our glory, is swept up in that bonfire of Gods heart. Then we’re free to worship without making a name for ourselves outside of the grace of God.

When I hear people say, “Well, it’s not about us anyway,” I say, “That’s absolutely wrong.”

That's why the angels are stunned, because the transcendent God made it significantly about those fallen demonic creatures. They said, "We can't do the math on this."

Jesus says, "I want to marry you and bring you into the most profound fellowship in My heart." It's not only about us, but it's profoundly about us.

Again, when I hear that—it's not just young people; it's older ones as well—what they normally mean is this: "It's not about making ourselves some big something outside of the will of God." I look forward to the day when the language gets settled right. We have this idea that it's really about God and we just sort of melt into nothingness. When it's really about God, we enter into our grandeur and our dignity, our beauty and our glory, and He smiles. He's saying, "Oh, I love this. The beauty I possess, I have given you. The greatness I have, I've imparted to you, and it has made you great." It's fantastic.

When we drink of this reality, we abide in the realm of the Holy Spirit. We abide in God. We have the ability to operate in anointing. When it says, "Abide in God, live in God," it means, "Live in the realm in which God lives, and live in Him." God will manifest His anointing in that person. We want people to live in the Spirit, to abide in God; we want to get them to live in the realm of God, and we want the realm of God to be manifest through them. We call that anointed ministry and an anointed life. We want them to drink deeply of love. Get them to abide in love; to drink at the well of the doctrine of love. It will rearrange their spirit; it will absolutely change the way that they carry their heart before God.

"THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE, BUT PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR"

That's what the rest of the passage is about. I'll give a little hint of it and develop it more tomorrow. "Love has been perfected among us in this." Instead of the word *perfected*, put the word *mature*. Your experience of love is mature this way. This is how the experience of love matures. We want matured love. We want all three dimensions. We want to know that God loves us; we want to love God back and we want to overflow in love towards people, including ourselves. We want the whole realm of love to mature. It's only a sterile, academic approach that separates those dimensions. They're really all one reality. You can't separate them.

Love in your life matures in this way. This is the way that love matures: that you have boldness in the day of judgment. This doesn't even make sense. My love matures and I have boldness on the day of judgment. "Lord, did I miss something in the equation?" When I first began to read this, I was just beginning teaching. Some years ago I taught 1 John and I remember someone said, "1 John and John are the main books." I was so confused by that. It didn't seem logical that we become mature in love by having confidence in the day of judgment. I couldn't connect the ideas.

Then I read the third phrase: "Because as He is, so also are we in this world." Those were three very odd statements in one sentence. I said, "I don't get any of this." It goes on to describe it, and I'll describe it more in verse 18. "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 Jn. 4:18). "Perfect love" means "mature love."

Here's the key phrase: "Fear involves torment." Instead of the word *fear*, put the word *rejection*. That's what we're taking about. We're taking about fear on the day of judgment; we're talking about rejection. We're not talking about fear of heights or fear of sharks. The fear that we're talking about is the fear of rejection. If you have a friend and they heard a story about you that's negative, and they whispered it and said, "That man is

really off the wall,” and you heard it, and you believed it, the next time you go around that dearly beloved friend, your heart is guarded. There’s torment in the relationship. You think, “I opened my heart to you, and you think I’m really off the wall.”

The man says, “Well, the truth is I believe the rumor and I think that you’re really off the wall.” That’s the torment it’s talking about. You can call it fear; it’s the fear of rejection that we’re talking about. It’s the fear of being banished from the presence of God, and this involves torment. The day on which torment reaches its highest is the day of judgment. There’s no greater day of torment than the day of judgment. Here we are and we stand before God, and the absolute truth of everything you are is now open. Romans says that Gods judgments are manifest in this age, but only a little (Rev. 2:5). On the day of judgment, they’re openly manifest. Whatever judgment God has, even in the most severe case, it’s only a partial judgment in this age. Judgment is veiled in this age. On the last day there’s no barrier. The time has come and the judgment is in full. What a day!

Here’s what it says. This is what God is getting at. In that day there will be real torment and rejection. There will be anguish. They will be weeping and gnashing their teeth. Luke says they’ll all be at the table, and Jesus will say, “Depart from Me.”

They’ll say, “Wait, No, we ate with you when You were with us, back when You were in the flesh, in Nazareth, in Galilee. You came to our house. Remember? I’m the man who invited you in.”

Jesus says, “In that day they’ll have so much torment, they’ll be in so much anguish, they’ll go into eternal darkness with absolute weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Lk. 13:28, paraphrased). Why? Because His presence is so lovely and torment has reached its absolute pinnacle.

Here’s what John is saying in verse 17. Love has been matured in this: that you have boldness in the day when judgment reaches its fullness. Judgment has no barrier. It’s the truth of who you are. If you’re an unbeliever, it’s who you are on your own. If you’re a believer, it’s who you are in Christ. The truth of who you are absolutely is all that you bring on that day—the day when wrath has no diminishing, the day when wrath is at full force; when there’s absolutely nothing to hold it back, like now. You’ll have boldness in your spirit. All the truth of your weakness and all the truth of the grace of God in your life mix and produce boldness. You’ll stand there saying, “This is amazing. I’m not afraid.”

WE WILL HAVE A CONFIDENT SPIRIT EVEN IN THE FACE OF JUDGMENT

Here’s what John is saying in verse 17. Love has been matured. You’ll have a confident spirit even in the prospect of the full judgment. You’ll stand with boldness in your spirit. That’s when you drank from love, and it has matured in you. Because on that day you’ll know that the grace in which God the Father looks at Jesus is the way He looks at you; as He is, in the present tense. Right now on the throne, as He is, so also are we, even in the fallen world. As God the Father looks at Jesus, so also He looks at me now—as Jesus is now. I’m standing there with boldness in my spirit knowing that as He is, right now at His right hand, I am now, and I have confidence in my spirit. I don’t always have confidence, but that’s the goal. I’m standing before God and I say, “I’m drinking of love. I love it! I love it!”

What John is doing is equipping them to love God back and to overflow in love to other people. He’s showing them the way to abide. Drink of this realm, and confidence will explode in your spirit.

YOU'LL ONLY KNOW JESUS TO THE DEGREE THAT YOU KNOW JESUS LOVES YOU

Look at verse 19. You will only love Jesus to the degree that you know Jesus loves you. You'll only enjoy Jesus to the degree that you know He enjoys you. You'll only pursue Him to the degree you know He has pursued you. You'll be dedicated to the degree that you know He's dedicated to you. Whatever you know about Him towards you is what's awakened in you back to Him.

Beloved, this is the way to like other people. Here we are. We're broken. Again, we have that rusty, crusty spirit, all spiritually barren, with demons hitting us, with stale believers, with the oil running out of our lamps. You're thinking, "Man, I've got to get going again. I have to get that Word in my spirit." You open the Word and you're thumbing through it and thinking, "OK, where do I start? I'll do this book." I've done that a few times.

John says, "No, you don't have to play Russian roulette like that." He says, "Go and drink of love. Go live in the world of love. Feed your spirit on love." If you feed your spirit on love, then you get into the realm of God; you get into the realm of the activity of the Spirit. You get into the realm of God and the activity of the Spirit starts touching you. When that happens, then God starts flowing through you and it starts manifesting to others. Then what happens is that you start loving God, and then you love people. You experience all three dimensions. You love yourself, you love your church, and you love the lost, because you're in the realm of tenderness. You're in the realm of Holy Spirit activity. You love people, you love yourself, you love God, and you love being alive. Maybe the work is hard, but you love being alive; your spirit is alive in confidence.

Amen. Let's stand.